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# I'm off for a dip... in the Antarctic

Never mind watching penguins – brave **Sarah Bridge** is determined to swim with them

**I** HAD imagined my trip to Antarctica dozens of times but I'd never pictured myself sunbathing there, let alone going for a swim. Yet here I was, plunging into the icy ocean (after a few seconds in zero-degree temperatures, the water really starts to bite) and then drying off on a pebbly beach in the sunshine.

Just a few yards away, a group of chinstrap penguins popped out of the water and were pottering

around on the shore, totally unfazed by my swimming exploits. What an amateur, they were probably thinking to themselves.

It was day four of my 16-day Antarctic cruise with Norwegian cruise operator Hurtigruten and I felt as if I'd landed on another planet.

There is an incredible other-worldly feeling about Antarctica: the epic black-and-white landscape; the vast sense of space and sky; the glaciers and icebergs, which look as if they are lit from

inside by a bright-blue fire; and the ice-topped ocean, which any moment could be disturbed by the whoosh of a whale spouting.

It is truly like nothing else on Earth.

My journey had begun several hundred miles north, in the wind-swept Chilean town of Punta Arenas, where we boarded our ship prior to sailing through the famous Magellan Strait and Beagle Channel.

To embark on this kind of trip is to

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follow in the footsteps of famed explorers of the past: Darwin, Shackleton, Scott, Magellan.

Landing at the fabled Cape Horn, graveyard to more than 800 ships, we felt as if we were teetering on the very edge of the Earth.

After 36 hours crossing the 500-mile wide Drake Passage, we woke up to find all the colour had been

sucked from the world. This was Half Moon Island, the site of the first of our many encounters with penguins – and my icy swim.

**F**ROM here we travelled to Deception Island, a stunning volcano caldera five miles across, and then, on the 105th anniversary of Amundsen's arrival at the South Pole, we arrived in Neko Harbour and set foot on the Antarctic continental plate for the first time.

It's a stunning place, with panoramic views of snow-topped mountains surrounding a flat, grey

sea that reflected the snowy peaks. Each day the views and experiences became more incredible: hiking to the squawks of hundreds of gentoo penguins and the rumble and crash of a nearby glacier; walking on clear-blue ice that would disappear in a day; spotting fat leopard seals sunning themselves on the snow; and watching a pod of killer whales feed by the ship as we drifted across a wide stretch of water called the Lemaire Channel, which is guarded by two towering peaks.

When we weren't hiking or cruising in little Zodiac dinghies, time was spent on board either eating – our ship, the MS Midnatsol, has an excellent restaurant – listening to

the fascinating talks from the expedition team (our trip included one from maritime campaigner Lewis Pugh), or going out on deck to watch whales, penguins and

icebergs float past (and taking hundreds more photos).

With views like that, this was one cruise ship that had no need to provide additional entertainment. Sorting through the 3,000 pictures I took on the trip, however, might take some time...

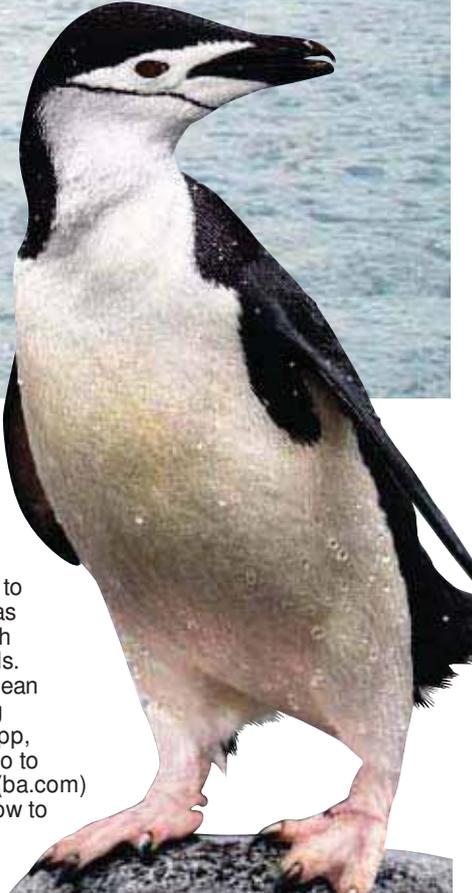
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## GETTING THERE

**Hurtigruten** ([hurtigruten.co.uk](http://hurtigruten.co.uk)) runs year-round adventure trips to Antarctica and surrounding areas including Chile, Argentina, South Georgia and the Falkland Islands. A 15-day Adventure To The Chilean Fjords and Antarctica, departing November 7, costs from £4,402pp, including transfers from Santiago to Punta Arenas. **British Airways** ([ba.com](http://ba.com)) offers return flights from Heathrow to Santiago from £949.



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## LATE DEALS OF THE WEEK

**BARGAIN** **BEST ALL-INCLUSIVE**  
SAVE up to 50 per cent on seven nights at the Hawksbill Beach Resort by Rex Resorts in Antigua if you book by the end of the month. The break costs from £899pp for departures in September, including return flights from Gatwick and all-inclusive accommodation. Visit [travelbag.co.uk](http://travelbag.co.uk) or call 020 7001 4112.

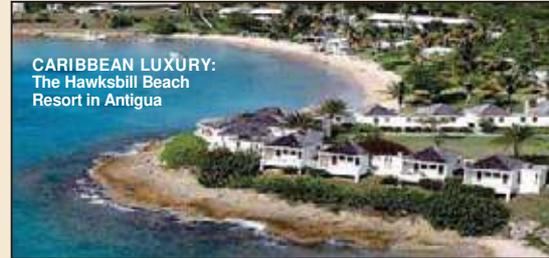
**BARGAIN** **BEST FERRY**  
CROSSINGS from Dover to Calais or Dunkirk start at £39 one-way for car and up to nine people with DFDS. Visit [dfds.co.uk](http://dfds.co.uk).

**BARGAIN** **BEST CAMPING**  
TAKE the family to the Costa Brava on September 3 for seven nights, staying at Camping Playa Brava. The site has a swimming pool, tennis court and

mini-golf, and there's also access to a sandy beach. Prices start at £188 for a three-bedroom mobile home with air-conditioning. Visit [venueholidays.co.uk](http://venueholidays.co.uk) or call 01233 629950.

**BARGAIN** **BEST TROPICAL**  
HEAD to the Maldives on September 6 and spend seven nights on a half-board basis at the Sun Island Resort and Spa. The trip costs from £838pp, including return flights from Gatwick. Visit [awayholidays.co.uk](http://awayholidays.co.uk).

**BARGAIN** **BEST SELF-CATERING**  
STAY at Eastcott Farmhouse in north Cornwall with Sykes Cottages ([sykescottages.co.uk](http://sykescottages.co.uk), 01244 617683). The property sleeps ten and has slate floors, in addition to a spacious private garden. Prices start at £799 for a seven-night stay from September 9.



**CARIBBEAN LUXURY:**  
The Hawksbill Beach Resort in Antigua

**BARGAIN** **BEST FLIGHT**  
CATHAY Pacific has an autumn seat sale with return fares from the UK to Hong Kong starting at £469 and to Perth from £629, for travel up to June 2018. Visit [cathaypacific.co.uk](http://cathaypacific.co.uk).

**BARGAIN** **BEST ACTIVITY**  
A WEEK at Les Cottages de Valjoly in northern France has been discounted by 35 per cent for

arrivals on September 23. The lakeside cabins sleep up to four and cost from £143. Visit [summerfrance.co.uk](http://summerfrance.co.uk).

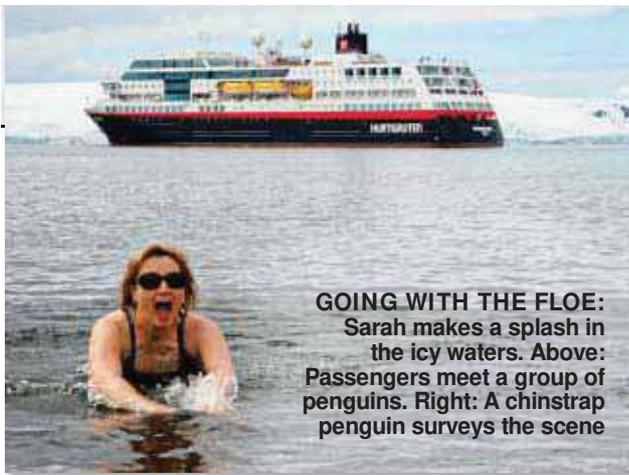
**BARGAIN** **BEST SUN**  
HEAD to the Riviera Maya in Mexico for seven nights at the Grand Riviera Princess with First Choice ([firstchoice.co.uk](http://firstchoice.co.uk)). All-inclusive prices start at £967pp for departures from Glasgow on September 10.

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**GOING WITH THE FLOE:**  
Sarah makes a splash in the icy waters. Above: Passengers meet a group of penguins. Right: A chinstrap penguin surveys the scene